



Issue 39 (2007)
September 21-27, 2007

Part 1: News Analysis

President Berdymukhamedov's first trip to the United States as Turkmenistan's president, to attend the annual UN General Assembly, was relatively low-profile as the US did not extend him a state visit. But the UN's preoccupation with the crisis in Myanmar (Burma) and media attention to his more controversial neighbor, Iran's President Ahmadinejad, almost completely overshadowed his brief moment in the international spotlight. The Turkmen president did meet with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in the margins of the General Assembly, and with top executives from Chevron, Shell, British Petroleum and other potential investors eager to persuade the Central Asian president to have Turkmenistan set its own prices and work with Western partners to construct alternative routes to those monopolized by Russia's Gazprom. Always careful to keep his options open, the Turkmen leader said at a meeting of prominent businessmen at the Eurasia Group that he would distance himself from politics and consider projects purely on a commercial basis, assuring potential investors that there were enough oil and gas reserves in Turkmenistan to satisfy all world-market demands.

President Berdymukhamedov used the occasion of his public exchange at the World Leaders Forum, held at Columbia University on September 25, to go on the record on difficult questions about Turkmenistan's human rights. While stating that "Our main goal today is to guarantee equal rights and law enforcement," he denied the existence of some of most glaring human rights violations in Turkmenistan, such as state control of the media and repression of NGOs. He chose the propagandistic tactic not only of making misleading statements about an environmental group and a student newspaper editor, but throwing listeners off balance by seeming to anticipate their concerns with false moral equivalencies – tactics for which his Soviet predecessors were known. A somber indication of the real level of press freedom in Turkmenistan came with the public plea this week from a U.S. media group, the Committee to Protect Journalists, which called on Secretary Rice to urge the Turkmen leader to permit an independent probe into the death in custody of Ogulsapar Muradova, Ashgabat correspondent for the Turkmen Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, who died in state custody in September 2006 after being sentenced to six years in prison on spurious charges in a closed trial.

Possibly conscious of the need to offer assurances to Turkmenistan's main trading partner, Russia, while on a trip to meet with U.S. competitors, the Turkmen president arranged for special Russian Language Days to be held in Ashgabat this week. Like claims of NGO and press freedom, the festivities were largely out of proportion to the reality: only some 70 Turkmen students have been allowed to study abroad in Russia this year. While there has been a state-sponsored promotion of Russian language and culture, such as the Russian Language Days in Ashgabat, the climate for non-Turkmen was marred by what appeared to be an arson attack on the popular Russian Bazaar, which destroyed merchants' booths and wares.

Part 2: News Digest

Summary: In New York for the UN General Assembly this week, President Berdymukhamedov used a public form to assert that “our people, not our gas, are our greatest asset,” but ducked hard questions about human rights violations. In meetings with business leaders, he said oil and gas production targets will ensure enough energy for all market demands but avoided comments about politics. The apparent arson attack on the Russian Bazaar in Ashgabat was a sober contrast to Russian-language promotion this week and Turkmen government promises to teach more Russian in schools.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Turkmenistan President Speaks at UN General Assembly

Original title: *Turkmen Leader Makes Statement at UN. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/09/27/07 and un.org/09/26/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11137&type=event&sort=date_desc

Complete webcast in Russian and English can be found at <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/62/> and English-language text can be found at

<http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/62/2007/pdfs/turkmenistan-eng.pdf>

Synopsis: Speaking at the UN General Assembly September 26, President Berdymukhamedov said his country was open to the world for a wide-ranging partnership in all areas, turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the UN News Center. He said the new UN Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, to be opened later this year in Ashgabat, was an indication of Turkmenistan's foreign policy and cooperation with the UN. "We highly appreciate the decision to set up the Center in Ashgabat --the capital of neutral Turkmenistan--and we see this as an expression of trust for our country on behalf of the United Nations", the president said, adding that he saw the center as playing a positive role in resolving problems in the region.

Berdymukhamedov spoke in favor of the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia, expressed concern about events in Afghanistan, and indicated Turkmenistan's efforts to assist Afghanistan in restoring its economy, training specialists and constructing public facilities. Turkmenistan supplies a number of Afghan provinces with petroleum products and electricity. The Turkmen leader indicated that the modern transport and communication infrastructure in Turkmenistan at the junction of Eurasian routes can help promote trade and economic relations in the region and deepen cultural interaction. "It is in that spirit that Turkmenistan defines its international energy strategy aimed at developing a multiple pipelines system to bring Turkmen energy resources to the international markets on a stable and long-term basis", the president said. Mindful of ecological issues, Berdymukhamedov said his country earmarked US \$200 million annually to protect the environment.

The Turkmen president also spoke about reform process underway to democratize political life and establish civil society. "Constructive innovative search for a reasonable balance between the authority of the state and society at large is under way. We are not trying to speed up the process, we are not pushing it into some artificial timeframe", said Berdymukhamedov.

b. Turkmen Leader Welcomes Planned UN Regional Diplomacy Center in Central Asia

Source: un.org/09/26/07

Full version: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=23989&Cr=general&Cr1=debate>

Plans by the UN to set up a preventive diplomacy center in Central Asia represent a "milestone in the world body's efforts to bring peace and stability to the region," the UN News Center reported, citing a speech by President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov to the UN General Assembly September 26. Berdymukhamedov said his country was certain that the work of the center – which is expected to be established in Ashgabat, the Turkmen capital, later this year – could be "a strong positive force in resolving the problems our region faces."

Vowing to "do everything necessary to make the center's work effective and fruitful," the President told the annual high-level debate that cooperation with the UN was the critical element in Turkmenistan's wider foreign policy. "This is most apparent in regional matters, where it is the participation of the United Nations and its specialized agencies that promotes convergence of approaches of States to issues, [and the] creation of a favorable political, diplomatic and legal environment for their resolution by joint effort," he said.

The principles enshrined in the UN Charter "should continue to serve as the moral and legal pillar of the international order," and all UN reforms should take account of this, he said. Berdymukhamedov also called for the Security Council's structure to change, and for better and closer relations between the Council and the General Assembly.

c. Turkmen President in the U.S. Claims Press, NGOs Operate Freely

Original title: *Turkmenistan: President Says Press, NGOs Operate Freely. Excerpts prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.*

Source: rferl.org/09/24/07

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/09/96CBE108-BA4B-4B35-BA75-6B2D4064AE97.html>

Excerpts: Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov visited Columbia University in New York City September 24 and assured his audience that freedom of speech and of the press in his country was not violated and that registering and running a foreign nongovernmental organization is a simple, straightforward process, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported.

Berdymukhamedov led an interactive presentation where pupils in supposedly regular middle schools in Turkmenistan were shown typing on sleek, late-model computer laptops, girls dressed in traditional costumes were dancing in a sparkling city park, and a provincial bazaar abounded in fruits and vegetables. They were scenes of a Turkmenistan, where, as the president said, not natural gas, but people, are its "greatest asset."

Turkmenistan is not known for its respect for its people or for human rights. Hundreds of people are imprisoned in Turkmenistan for their political beliefs. Asked about the state of political freedoms in the country and in particular about the fate of two former members of the previous cabinet whose whereabouts are unknown, Berdymukhamedov chose that moment to announce that there will now be amnesties for prisoners during each of the country's official holidays instead of an amnesty once a year, as has been customary in the past.

"This year for the national holiday, we will give amnesty to 9,000 prisoners," he said.

[Passage omitted on acknowledgement that the prisoners are still alive and on history of the *Ruhnama*].

Berdymukhamedov told the audience that "*Ruhnama*" is a cultural asset of Turkmenistan and there are no plans to retire it. "The book '*Ruhnama*' -- and I want to emphasize this -- the book will be mandatory reading in all educational institutions, from kindergarten through college. Why? Because it contains a lot of wisdom related to our heritage," he said.

Asked why Western NGOs are not allowed to operate in Turkmenistan, he said the question is moot. "Please, this is not an issue. There are no restrictions," he said. "By the way, let me tell you that just before our departure to the U.S. we were approached by some young [Turkmen] people who were studying here in America. They presented their program regarding some environmental issues. We were pleased to accommodate them. [We] sent their application to the Ministry of Justice for registration. I think by our return they will receive a license. The same procedures apply for [U.S.] NGOs."

[Passage omitted on student questions about freedom of the press, Freedom House's ranking of Turkmenistan with its lowest score for both media freedom and human rights, and president's denial of any problem.]

"There was never in Turkmenistan any pressure on the press. In general, I would like to say to the youth that in Turkmenistan there is a big newspaper for youth...And to find solutions to such problems [as freedom of the press], I appointed as editor in chief a student, a student from a Turkmen university. If it is not sufficient, well, thank you. By the way, if I'm not mistaken, the student is a sophomore, right? No, he's a senior -- editor in chief of the newspaper for youth, a member of the government already."

[Passage omitted on president's invitation to speak further with the delegation, and RFE/RL's unsuccessful effort to reach them.]

d. Turkmenistan President Focuses on Medicine and Education

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: *The Columbia Spectator*/09/25/07

Full version: <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/?q=node/26936>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov spoke at a World Leaders Forum at Columbia University September 25, focusing on medicine and education as fundamental principles of his nation's policy and reforms, *The Columbia Spectator*, the student newspaper reported. "“We regard ourselves as an integral part of the world civilization and, on the other hand, we follow our own, unique path in history and culture,” Berdymukhamedov said in a speech which was translated and distributed in print before the meeting, and accompanied by a slide show of pictures during his presentation.

The Turkmen leader was 15 minutes late for the scheduled appearance, causing the translator, evidently unaware that her microphone was on, to speculate that he appeared to wish to reduce time for questioning. He took questions for about 20 minutes, stressing that he had opened up what he said were unrestricted Internet cafes in Ashgabat. Harriman Institute Director Catharine Nepomnyashchy, who moderated the discussion, commented, "“The world is hopeful that the president will extend policies to address poverty and human rights.” In response to a query from a student concerned about press freedom, the Turkmen leader responded, "We never had any pressure of repression of the press." After the event, another student was quoted as saying she felt Berdymukhamedov had been "defensive" in his remarks, and had failed to discuss his new energy programs.

e. U.S. Officials Woo Turkmenistan's President

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: *ihf.com*/09/25/07

Full version: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/09/25/business/turkmen.php>

Synopsis: U.S. officials meeting with President Berdymukhamedov in New York on his first trip to the U.S. are "forcefully wooing" the Turkmen leader in an effort to "weaken the grip of Gazprom, Russia's state-owned energy monopoly," the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) reported. U.S. officials say they want Berdymukhamedov to realize his alternative options for developing his nation's extensive natural gas deposits and delivering fuel to foreign markets. Russia buys 50 bcm of natural gas a year at below-market prices, and controls all of Turkmenistan's export routes. China has now signed an agreement for one of Turkmenistan's most promising fields and has agreed to ship 30 bcm over a period of 30 years.

"No one is trying to push Gazprom out of the Caspian - that's impossible," IHT quoted a U.S. official as saying. "What we want is for this totally dysfunctional system to change, where Gazprom can practically dictate the price for gas on the Turkmen end, and sells it for nearly three times that amount in Europe," he said. The U.S. would like to see Turkmenistan ship gas westward through an undersea pipeline to Turkey, and from there enter Europe's proposed Nabucco pipeline to Eastern Europe or to Greece.

The real size of Turkmenistan's reserves have not been revealed or independently confirmed, but are estimated at 3 trillion cm. "People are getting too far ahead of themselves," Jonathan Stern, an analyst at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies in England was quoted as saying. "We need to see what Turkmenistan's reserves are and where they are. Then we can start talking about projects."

f. U.S. Secretary of State Urges Turkmen Leader to Open up Energy Sector, Political Reforms

Original title: *U.S. Urges Turkmen Pres on Open Energy. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *cnn.org* and *Associated Press*/09/25/07

Full version: <http://money.cnn.com/news/newsfeeds/articles/newstex/AFX-0013-19814422.htm>

Synopsis: At a meeting with President Berdymukhamedov in New York, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged the Central Asian leader to open up his country's energy reserves to foreign development, diversify the economy, and embark on political reform, CNN and Associated Press (AP) reported.

"They discussed the development of political freedoms and an independent judiciary as well as the opportunities to promote economic growth, including diversification of the economy," a Department spokesman was quoted as saying. "They discussed how to create conditions for private investment and the development of a private economy in Turkmenistan. They talked about energy opportunities, including cooperation with U.S. companies, but also with other countries in the region," he said.

g. U.S. Media Rights Group Urges Rice to Raise Journalist's Case with Turkmen Leader

Original title: CPJ Urges Rice to Seek Probe in Turkmen Journalist's Death. Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: cpj.org/09/21/07

Full version: http://www.cpj.org/protests/07ltrs/europe/turkmen_rice21sep07pl.html

Excerpt: In a letter on September 21 to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists urged that the case of a Turkmen journalist who died while in state custody, be raised with President Berdymukhamedov during meetings this week in New York, cpj.org reported.

"Ogulsapar Muradova, Ashgabat correspondent for the Turkmen Service of the U.S. government-funded broadcaster Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, died in state custody in September 2006 after being sentenced to six years in prison on spurious charges in a summary, closed-door trial. A year after authorities handed Muradova's battered body to her family, the circumstances surrounding her death in government custody remain unexplained. Authorities have resisted international calls for an independent investigation into her death while failing to release official autopsy results," wrote CPJ in the letter.

"We urge you to include Muradova's case on the agenda for your coming meeting with President Berdymukhamedov. We are encouraged by remarks this week by Evan Feigenbaum, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, pledging U.S. engagement in the new Turkmenistan, including in the sphere of democracy-building and fostering human rights. 'We will never—never—turn a blind eye to problems,' Mr. Feigenbaum said at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, 'but we do see possibility of change. And if a transforming Turkmenistan can emerge as a success story in its region, we want to be a part of that transformation,'" CPJ quoted Feigenbaum as saying.

"In the spirit of turning a new page in U.S.-Turkmen relations, we encourage you to address the many questions surrounding Muradova's death in prison under former leader Saparmurat Niyazov, and to ask President Berdymukhamedov for his personal involvement in uncovering the truth about her death. The president's engagement in bringing justice in Muradova's death would signal Turkmenistan's readiness to become a part of a law-based international community," said CPJ.

[Passages omitted on background to Muradova's case.]

h. UN Official Says Turkmenistan Can Improve Its Human Rights Record

Source: BBC Monitoring—Central Asia/09/25/07/State News Agency/09/23/07

Richard Young, UN representative in Turkmenistan, has noted some opportunities for the Turkmen government to improve the human rights situation in the country, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing the State News Agency.

In an interview with the Turkmenowlethabarlary (State News Agency) published on 23 September, Young said: "At present, Turkmenistan is capable of concentrating its efforts on implementing recommendations to meet basic requirements of UN conventions on human rights issues."

Touching upon the Turkmen-UN partnership in this sphere, Young said that Turkmenistan has already joined several basic international conventions on human rights such as conventions on individual political, social, economic and cultural rights, the rights of children, and on eliminating racial, ethnic and gender discriminations.

Welcoming President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's recent decision to set up a special commission on monitoring the implementation of Turkmenistan's international commitments on human rights, Young said: "This fact once again demonstrates the Turkmen government's readiness for a constructive dialogue with international bodies." The agency also quoted Young as saying that the Turkmen government has invited a special UN rapporteur on human rights to visit Turkmenistan next year.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Russian Language Week Kicks Off in Ashgabat

Original title: Russian Language Days Open in Ashgabat. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/09/25/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11109&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Russian Language Days opened in Ashgabat at the Makhtumkulu Music Drama Theater, with the participation of the Russian Embassy, the Russian Center for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation of the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Turkmen Ministry of Culture and TV and Radio Broadcasting, turkmenistan.ru reported. Amb. Igor Blatov, the Russian envoy, said the festival was a "bright demonstration of the mutual aspiration of the two friendly countries to strengthen and develop interstate, political, economic, and spiritual relations."

Two Turkmen translators, Orazbike Orazkulieva and Hojamuhyammet Kakaliev, were awarded a monetary prize for their work and special diplomas from the Russian Center. It was the first such prize. A photo exhibit was also arranged at the theater and a dance performance of Cossack songs and dances by the Great Nation Ensemble of Voronezh.

b. More Russian to Be Taught in Turkmen Schools

Source: [BBC Monitoring Central Asia/09/26/07](http://www.bbc.com/monitoring-central-asia/09/26/07)

Turkmenistan has increased hours for teaching the Russian language at secondary and higher educational establishments, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing ITAR-TASS. This was announced at a conference of Russian-language teachers and lecturers from the capital and regions, which opened in Ashgabat September 25.

[Passage omitted: this forum is the first for the last several years]

Russia's envoy in Turkmenistan, Igor Blatov, in his opening remarks noted the increased partnership between Moscow and Ashgabat in the education sphere, which meets the tasks set for the sector by the new leader [President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov] of Turkmenistan.

[Passage omitted: over 70 Turkmen students were sent to Russia this year].

c. Russian Bazaar Burns Down in Ashgabat

Translation and Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights/ chrono-tm.org/09/24/07

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0251043415000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: The Russian Bazaar, one of the most popular marketplaces in Ashgabat, was set on fire by unknown arsonists in the early hours of September 24, the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) reported September 24 in an article on its website. Police cordoned off the site and the Ministry of Security and merchants were reported on the scene investigating the incident. Part of the bazaar was burned to the ground, and vendors were trying to recover merchandise from the ruins. Witnesses said the blaze broke out at 1:00 a.m. but firemen reached the scene only by morning, when the fire was nearly burned out. They believe that the fire was set deliberately, so as to maximize the damage to the mainly Russians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians who sell their wares there, and avoid damage to nearby state stores.

Vendors say that for a year, the mayor of Ashgabat has been urging the non-Turkmen vendors to leave the market voluntarily, but without success. The city has been renovating the bazaar and evidently wanted to tear down part of the marketplace and force out the sellers of the popular, cheap wares. Although there were no injuries, the merchants have lost their livelihoods. While they could attempt restoration of their booths, they do not expect to be able to return to the bazaar, TIHR reported.

3. Economic News

a. Turkmen Leader Meets with U.S. Businesses

Original title: *Turkmen President Meets with US Business. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/09/26/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11120&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov met with U.S. businessmen at the Rockefeller Center while attending the sessions of the UN General Assembly in New York this week, turkmenistan.ru reported. Eurasia Group organized a meeting of major firms including Case, British Petroleum, Chevron, Caterpillar, Parker Drilling, ExxonMobile, Sikorsky, and Shell. The Turkmen leader invited the businesses to take part in the Avaza National Tourist Zone on the Caspian coast.

Speaking about prospects for energy cooperation, Berdymukhamedov said he "distances himself from adding political context to purely commercial projects." He said that there were plans to increase national gas production up to 250 bcm and oil up to 100 million tons by 2030, and that these targets would enable Turkmenistan to meet the needs of the world market.

b. Turkmenistan May Raise Gas Price for Russia to \$150/1,000 cm

Original title: *Gazprom Runs Up Against Turkmen Boss: Price of Turkmen Gas May Rise to \$150. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: kommersant.ru/09/27/07

Full version: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=808720&NodesID=5>

Synopsis: According to unconfirmed reports coming from meetings with President Berdymukhamedov in New York, Turkmenistan may wish to charge US \$150 per 1,000 cm of gas, or 1.5 times the current price asked of Gazprom, even in violation of existing agreements, *Kommersant* reported. In meetings with U.S. businessmen while on his first trip to the U.S. to speak at the UN General Assembly, the Turkmen leader hinted that there may be a change in its strategic partnership. "Our new joint project with Kazakhstan -- the Caspian Pipeline -- will enable additional deliveries of Turkmen natural gas to Russia and other countries," *Kommersant* quoted the president unofficially as saying, adding that the export could amount to 30-40 bcm. "I won't hide the fact that the negotiation process on the prices of gas, both in the new project, and in existing agreements, is of a tense nature," the president was to have indicated without further detail. The remarks are being seen as an effort to indicate a wish to raise the price for Russia. Roman Matsuyev, owner of Russia's Energogaz said that Tachberdy Tagiev, the Turkmen vice premier and Minister of Oil and

Gas, had told him of Turkmenistan's intention to raise the price of gas from \$100 to \$150 per thousand cm starting January 2008, *Kommersant* reported.

The price rise is motivated, Matsuev says, by Gazprom's plan to raise prices for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, and Belarus. The disagreement over the gas price for Turkmenistan is holding up the finalizing of the agreement for the building of the Caspian pipeline. While Russia, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan agreed in principle in May to start the project, and Uzbekistan later joined the negotiations, the final agreement expected by September has not materialized. No official response on the issue of price changes has been made by either Russia or Turkmenistan, says *Kommersant*, and in response to queries about the expected agreement, officials at Gazprom have merely said documents are being "harmonized". Gazprom's existing agreement, signed with the late former president Saparmurat Niyazov, specified the purchase of up to 162 bcm from 2006-2009 for \$100 per 1,000 cm.

Kommersant believes that the Turkmen leader is seeking out partnerships against Russia. Last week, President Berdymukhamedov met with Malcolm Wicks, UK Minister of Energy, and invited British companies to prospect for oil and gas on the Caspian shelf in Turkmenistan. Wicks later told ITAR-TASS that he had discussed the possibility of a southern corridor (involving the Nabucco pipeline) to deliver gas from Turkmenistan through the Caspian to Azerbaijan, and then Turkey for EU markets. Wicks believed he received a positive response from the Turkmen leader. Ukraine, which buys Rosukrenergo's gas purchased from Turkmenistan, will be first to feel any price rise. Ukraine Vice Premier Andrei Klyuev hastened to assure the public that an agreement to purchase 34 bcm of Turkmen gas at the price of \$100 per 1,000 cm was already finalized; Rosukrenergo did not confirm the claim and believes negotiations will have to be made in October-November to clarify the price for Ukraine for 2008.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been prepared by OSI's Turkmenistan Project.

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